

Ellicott City Watershed Master Plan

7/31/2019 Master Plan Advisory Team Meeting Notes

Wednesday, July 31, 2019; 7:00 pm

The first meeting of the Ellicott City Master Plan Advisory Team (MPAT) created by Executive Order 2019-06 was held Wednesday, July 31, 2019, at the George Howard Building, 3430 Court House Drive, Ellicott City, MD 21043.

Consultants present: Tom McGilloway, Jeff Dube, Matt Thomasson, Lisa Wingate

Staff present: Valdis Lazdins (Planning and Zoning), Kate Bolinger (Planning and Zoning), Peter Conrad (Planning and Zoning)

MPAT present: Ben Barlow, Rob Brennan, Tom Coale, Barry Gibson, Alicia Jones-McLeod, Debbie Slack Katz, Ed Lilley, Lori Lilly, Gary Maule and Beth Woodruff

MPAT Absent: Simon Cortes

Kate Bolinger, Department of Planning and Zoning, opened the meeting at 7:02 pm by welcoming everyone to the first meeting of the 2019 Master Plan Advisory Team (MPAT). She outlined the agenda for the evening and described the contents of binders presented to each MPAT member, which included the Executive Order that created the group, the meeting agenda, an overview of MPAT and the master plan, and a listing of discussion topics.

K. Bolinger described the diverse backgrounds of the 2019 MPAT members, noting some members wear multiple 'hats' as residents, business owners, property owners and/or subject matter experts. She noted that some MPAT members have served or currently served on multiple Ellicott City-related boards, committees and groups. The MPAT members then introduced themselves, describing their connection to Ellicott City, the proverbial hat(s) they wear, and whether they served on the previous 2017-2018 MPAT or were new to MPAT.

Peter Conrad, Department of Planning and Zoning, provided an overview of the master plan purpose and scope, the role of MPAT, meeting protocol, and the planning schedule. He described how:

- The master plan will provide a framework for Ellicott City's long-term recovery and cover multiple subjects.

- The master plan will coordinate and integrate with the EC Safe and Sound plan.
- As a general plan amendment, the master plan will be subject to the county council adoption process.
- The master plan will take a long-term view, and that some master plan concepts will be for the medium and longer terms.
- Implementing the plan will involve keeping organizations and groups in communication with each other.
- The master plan geography is both the downtown area (Main Street west to Route 29) and the entire Tiber-Hudson Watershed.
- The role of MPAT is being at the apex of the public engagement process.
- MPAT members will advise the county and consultant team as they work toward a draft and completed plan.
- MPAT members should act as community liaisons and help encourage participation in the master plan effort, including the summer 2019 online open house.
- The Department of Planning and Zoning would lead meetings with the Mahan Rykiel team.
- MPAT meetings are designed for MPAT members, and members of the public participate in public workshops and online.
- The county and consultant team is restarting the “dimension” and “design” stages of the planning effort, and that by early next year, would complete the public engagement process for those stages.
- Since the master plan will be a general plan amendment, there will be a public draft plan, followed by a planning board draft, and then finally a council draft, with that process targeted for completion by the middle of next year.

An MPAT member asked how the restarted effort would be different from the prior master planning effort. P. Conrad said the restart is occurring in the middle of the master plan process. He pointed out that there is no draft plan from the prior effort, and that at this stage in the process the county and consultant team is still working towards the development of a draft plan. He said the county hopes for an increased level of public engagement in the restarted effort.

K. Bolinger said that the sequence of MPAT and public meetings would be different than in the past. She said the next MPAT meeting, to be scheduled for a date in October, will be planned to occur after a public meeting. She said MPAT members will be able to attend the public meeting, hear what other community members think, and then debrief with the county and consultant team. She said specific dates for the October public meeting and MPAT meeting would be announced when selected.

Tom McGilloway, Mahan Rykiel Associates, presented likely changes to previously-proposed master plan concepts given the Safe and Sound plan, along with a review of key topics within the master plan scope and geographic area. He described how the consultant team had outlined five strategy areas in 2018 that remained relevant. He said that everything in Ellicott City is interconnected, so concepts typically address multiple strategy areas. He said organizational strategies would build upon the work of the Community Development Corporation Exploration Committee.

T. McGilloway presented a series of previously-proposed concepts where significant changes would be likely for Lower Main, Lots A and B, Lots D and E (a.k.a. “Hudson Bend”), and Lots F and G.

For Lower Main, T. McGilloway described how the Safe and Sound plan proposes:

- Retaining portions of six buildings fronting Main Street while removing rear portions that extend over the stream channel.
- Removing only the first-floor portion of the “Shoemaker” building over the stream channel.
- Improved flood conveyance with twin culverts at Maryland Avenue.

T. McGilloway said the consultant team is:

- Looking at how the open channel space (where four buildings are proposed to be removed) will be designed.
- Considering the channel as a visual amenity rather than a gathering space.
- Exploring creating more amenity space along Main Street.
- Looking at the treatment of the new rear facades that will be created when back portions are removed.
- Recognizing the 106 process will help address rear façade treatment, and that part of the rear facades will have to function as flood walls.
- Exploring treatment of the Maryland Avenue streetscape.
- Considering treatment of buildings facing Tiber Alley that will front the open channel to activate the space.
- Seeing many opportunities for interpretation in the area as previously-proposed, including foundation markings or foundation reuse, metal framing to represent buildings (which could include shade sails) and public art to raise flood awareness.
- Looking at opportunities for pedestrian connections to St. Paul Street, for emergency egress.
- Thinking about rear façade treatments for newly visible St. Paul Street buildings.
- Still considering opportunities for overlooks from St. Paul Street buildings.

In response to the Lower Main presentation, MPAT members provided feedback:

- Like the idea of seating with interpretive signage so people can linger and connect to the place.
- Metal frame structures would overwhelm existing buildings.
- Hope the amenity space decision hasn’t necessarily been determined, as the idea of a gathering space with connection to water is appealing. There’s little area to gather in Ellicott City.
- Might it be better to take the buildings down, experience the space, and then contemplate what could go there, as an interim measure?
 - T. McGilloway responded that tactical urbanism is a trend where cheaper temporary treatments are used to test a design before more substantial investment is made.
 - P. Conrad responded that the master planning process will try to intersect with the 106 process, the latter of which often results in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

- How could the six partially remaining buildings be used in the future, with narrow footprints? What is the vision for those buildings? Concern the spaces will not be usable.
 - K. Bolinger responded that the Safe and Sound plan calls for the buildings to remain in public ownership until the flood mitigation is in place. She noted historically, some Lower Main buildings had smaller footprints.
- As an interim measure, use the buildings as entrepreneurial space.
- Could there be subsidized space for pop-up shops?
- There are some very small spaces elsewhere in Main Street.
- In many European communities, train stations are located on public squares – the open channel and Maryland Avenue area could create a space like a public square in front of the B&O.
- If a bridge goes across the channel, it needs to be elevated so it doesn't get destroyed.
- There are hinged bridges designed to breakaway during floods.
- The town was founded on mills. There should be something that tells visitors the history of the mills. People visit from all around the world.
 - T. McGilloway noted the Department of Recreation and Parks would like to look at Ellicott City as a district, similar to how Harpers Ferry is a heritage district.
- Public restrooms are needed in that section.
- The train station had one of the first restrooms in the United States.
- Would a farmer's market move to the space along Tiber Alley? And could sloped roofs or metal roofs be added to Tiber Alley buildings?
 - T. McGilloway responded that a market could ring from Maryland Avenue into Tiber Alley.
- Whatever engineered floodplain is designed should be intentionally easy to maintain. Think through how equipment will get in the channel to remove debris.

T. McGilloway presented streetscape and wayfinding concepts as previously-proposed, indicating opportunities for reassessment. He said the consultant team is:

- Looking at on-street parking.
- Evaluating opportunities to widen sidewalks.
- Considering treatment of Maryland Avenue as a transitional space that:
 - Functions most of the time as a street with parking but could occasionally function as event space, with mountable parking spaces paired with bollards to provide a widened pedestrian zone during events.
 - Could be paved differently.
- Still looking at wayfinding and branding as very important for navigation and messaging. The team developed ideas for a wayfinding system that used the Old Ellicott City brand.

In response to the streetscape and wayfinding presentation, MPAT members provided feedback:

- Ellicott City Partnership recently received a grant for wayfinding; the Partnership may want to collaborate on master plan wayfinding ideas.

- The bumpouts/widened sidewalks are exciting concepts that could completely change Ellicott City. People take risks getting in and out of cars along Main Street. Four cars were recently totaled in the West End that were parked on street.
 - T. McGilloway responded that bumpouts might be used in combination with drop-off/loading zones (recognizing businesses need access).
- Idea of using Maryland Avenue parking for markets is exciting.
- What is authentic Ellicott City? People are not visiting because it's a generic place.
- Loading zones are very important for businesses.
- Maryland Avenue's driving lanes can not be closed; they're needed for egress.
 - T. McGilloway responded that the concept would allow parking spaces to be closed during events but leave the travel lanes open.
- Ellicott City is a different town during the day Monday to Friday, another in the evening Monday to Friday, and another on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Appreciate the mountable curb and bollards concept to leave parking but also allow widened sidewalks when visitors are in town; a good compromise.
- Love the wayfinding ideas.

For Lots A and B and the Patapsco riverfront area, T. McGilloway presented previously-proposed concepts and noted areas of likely updates. He said:

- A bicycle-pedestrian bridge over the Patapsco is still relevant and would have to be high enough to meet the trolley trail as well as elevated high above the river.
- The master plan consultant team will not be designing the bridge, but rather describing it as an opportunity and indicating where it should go.
- The bridge should be designed as a signature bridge.
- Lot B is the only area not bound by train tracks where one can get to the Patapsco on the Ellicott City side.
- A parking garage in Lot A, in Oella, is still an option. If it were pursued, that could allow some of the parking spaces in Lot B to be converted to park space adjacent to the river. The park space could feature a gazebo or pavilion.
- Historically, there was once a truss bridge over the river.
- Other communities have signature bridges that have become places/attractions of their own. In Greenville, South Carolina, a bridge is used as a gallery during events.
- This type of bridge would engage and immerse people with the Patapsco river.
- The tunnel bore will exit in the general area north of Lot B by the river, and the consultant team needs to think about the interface of the tunnel outlet and the Lot B riverfront vicinity.

In response to the Lots A and B and riverfront presentation, MPAT members provided feedback:

- Is the consulting team aware of an older study the United States Army Corps completed for a riverfront boardwalk?
 - T. McGilloway responded the team was aware of the study and supports the concept, generally, of providing an amenity in the riverfront area.
- If the tunnel is built, what will 15 feet of flood water exiting the tunnel mean for this area?
 - M. Thomasson responded that energy dissipation at the tunnel outlet will have to be included in the design (by the tunnel design team), so that flood water does not damage the park nor erode the riverbank. He said one way to dissipate energy is by splitting the tunnel outlet into multiple pipes. He said a flume can be designed that lets a wave dissipate the energy.
 - M. Thomasson said that when the recent flash floods have happened, a simultaneous peak has not occurred in the Patapsco, so an issue with capacity is not anticipated.
- There could be a situation where a hurricane causes flooding of both the river and tributaries.
- It's hard to visualize what the tunnel outlet looks like. Will it be an 18-foot hole?
 - T. McGilloway responded that based on preliminary conversations with McCormick Taylor, the outlet cannot have a gate because debris could block it. He said a low flow of water in the tunnel might be an option.
 - T. McGilloway said the master planning process will be ahead of the tunnel design, so the master plan's role is to raise questions and identify opportunities to inform the tunnel design.
- With Baltimore County owning Lot A, how would the bridge work if a parking garage is not built?
 - T. McGilloway responded that the bridge would connect to the existing trolley trail and could be independent of a parking garage. He said the team had some conversations with Baltimore County before the 2018 flood and needs to continue those conversations.
 - L. Wingate said that the land for Lot A was donated by Charles Wagandt with the assumption the lot would be used by both Baltimore and Howard counties.
- Howard County built the surface parking lot in Lot A, so the county has precedent. There is an agreement between the two counties for use in perpetuity.
- Look for improvements on both sides of the Patapsco and mirror improvements.
 - L. Wingate noted some of the land on the Baltimore County side might be owned by Charles Wagandt.
 - V. Lazdins said there is a wonderful bridge that links two cities in Massachusetts over a river; the Shelburne Falls bridge is decorated in flowers during the summer months.
 - T. McGilloway said the Shelburne Falls flower bridge is essentially a garden in the summer.
- Is the green area between the B&O and Patapsco usable?
 - T. McGilloway responded that the area is inaccessible because of the train tracks.
- The vegetation in the area between the B&O and Patapsco could be trimmed to open views to the B&O museum.

T. McGilloway presented previously-proposed concepts and described likely updates to Lots D and E and the area of “Hudson Bend.” He said:

- The name “Hudson Bend” referred to the place. Hudson Bend previously included flood mitigation but also other elements. The consultant team is still calling the Lots D and E areas “Hudson Bend” even though the flood mitigation aspect is not included.
- A parking garage in Lot D could still be an option.
- An amenity space in Lot D could still be planned.
- Sidewalk materials are continuing to be explored. Previously, the consultant team had recommended concrete for resiliency with the expectation that flood mitigation would be many years down the road. The bricks sidewalks are not resilient.
- With the Safe and Sound plan proposing flood mitigation in five years, there could be a temporary sidewalk treatment with concrete and brick in the future. The consultant team will develop a couple of options and recommendations.
- Previously-proposed sketch showed the channel as an amenity space, and parking wrapped with new spaces. Any new buildings would have to be compatible with Ellicott City’s character. Previously-presented examples of new buildings in historic districts included those in Frederick, Maryland and Grand Rapids, Michigan.
- The market study the master plan consultants prepared indicated Ellicott City was leaking sales in home furnishings, restaurants and food-related uses like food halls – all uses that typically operate in larger spaces. The previous concept for a parking garage wrapped with new space would not only recoup parking but also provide room for these types of businesses.
- Given the market study findings, and with smaller footprints coming to Lower Main, the concept for new larger-footprint spaces could still be valid.
- While the open channel for flood mitigation is no longer proposed in Lots D and E, the consultant team is exploring options for amenity spaces in Lots D and E.
- In Lot D, there could be surface parking with an amenity along the tributaries.
- The consultant team will be reevaluating the parking strategy. Previously Lots D and E were central to flood mitigation, but that is no longer the case. With the proposed tunnel, Lots F and B might be needed as construction staging areas.
- Lots F, D and A are all appropriately sized for a parking garage; Lot B is not appropriate for a parking garage.
- The consultant team will look at the idea of a temporary shuttle to the courthouse lot. In Greenville, South Carolina, an independent business operates a ten-person shuttle. The consultant team developed mocked-up images of a ten-person shuttle branded as “the funicular.”

MPAT members provided feedback to the presentation on Lots D and E:

- Lot D of all parcels has the greatest opportunity for a public-private partnership. The welcome center and the parking lot together could be a large public gathering space. Some of the existing buildings around Lot D like La Palapa have larger footprint spaces and could be part of organizing the elements of this space.
- Support Lot D becoming an amenity space, with the stream represented. Lot D could be surface parking at times and closed down as a gathering space at other times.
 - M. Thomasson said previously, the flood mitigation aspect of “Hudson Bend” had to be a certain size. With the Safe and Sound plan, it doesn’t have to be a large channel.
- The scale of the Lot D garage/wrapper building is concerning. The landscape is as important as the original structures. At present one gets the sense of the hill and Old Columbia Pike wrapping the hill. If there was a large building, Lot D would lose some of its character and textural feel. Could the scale of the building be smaller? The wrapped garage would be a new concept and a false sense of density.
 - T. McGilloway said that without the restraints of the width previously needed for the large open channel, there might be more options.
- Show more ground level sketches than bird’s eye views to convey scale.
- Lot E offers a good opportunity to serve as a gateway for people entering town from the Courthouse parking lot and the staircase.
 - T. McGilloway noted the staircase has one of the best views in Ellicott City. Lot E could be a parking lot most of the time but occasionally be an amenity space.
- Views from Lot E up the staircase are also lovely.
- Any redevelopment in Lot D has to have stormwater management for both quality and quantity.
- The brewery annex building is located at the largest existing constriction point; that constriction is not being removed.
 - M. Thomasson said the tunnel modeling has been based on the 2016 storm. He said the idea of allowing some base flow through the tunnel is under consideration and would be evaluated through preliminary design of the tunnel. He said that evaluation would impact how much base flow would still be diverted through Lots E and D.

For Lots F and G (former Roger Carter Center), T. McGilloway presented previously-proposed concepts and described likely updates. He said:

- The tunnel inlet will be somewhere in the Lot F vicinity.
- Previously-proposed concepts included: moving the surface parking lot up and west to get more space around the stream tributary to the east, and a multi-level parking garage with access from Ellicott Mills Drive and Fels Lane.
- The parking garage concept previously included space that could accommodate artist studios. Greenville, South Carolina leases 18-foot deep spaces fronting a garage to artists as incubator space.

- A consideration for the tunnel inlet design is the incorporation of the inlet into a parking garage design.
- Previous public input on a parking garage included ideas for green/living walls and solar panels.
- The concept of a gateway park in the Lot G vicinity is still relevant. The space lends itself to an amphitheater but there are concerns with nearby residents.
- Barnard Fort is being planned as a heritage campus, and there is opportunity to create a trail network connecting various historic resources throughout Ellicott City.
- Lot G should be still explored as part of the parking strategy.

MPAT members provided feedback to the presentation on Lots F and G:

- Plan for a pavilion in Lot G so people can enjoy the space with shade.
- Could the tunnel inlet be treated as a waterfall?
 - M. Thomasson noted the tunnel inlet will need to be designed with considerations for public safety and efficient movement of water.
 - T. McGilloway said the master plan is charged to set some parameters for tunnel design consideration, since other professionals will design the tunnel.

For the West End, T. McGilloway presented previously-proposed concepts that are still relevant. He said:

- Pedestrian crosswalks and streetscape improvements are recommended to calm traffic.
- Streetscape improvements would require coordination with property owners.
- The long-term concept for the West End Service Center is still relevant. The current owner has no plans to change, but the master plan frames the long-term opportunities for the future. The long-term concept includes stream daylighting, open space, and ideas for development built into the hillside and single-family residential above.
- The long-term concept for the West End Service Center includes potential to connect to a broader pedestrian network in Ellicott City.
- A maker's space was presented as a reuse opportunity for some of the existing space if the auto service use were to ever relocate.

T. McGilloway presented previously-proposed concepts that are still relevant for the courthouse area. He said:

- Future use of the courthouse and any redevelopment of the parking lot would be established through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process.
- The master plan sets parameters for consideration in that RFP process. One example of a parameter is the need for a clear street and pedestrian network.

For the Tiber-Hudson watershed, T. McGilloway presented previously proposed concepts that are still relevant. He said:

- Pedestrian connectivity into Ellicott City is desired along corridors such as Frederick Road.

- Character based codes could be explored for new development. Such codes can encourage architecture to fit the site and landform.
- Code enforcement is an issue that would have to be addressed county wide.
- Debris management and maintenance has been improved with the work under Safe and Sound.
- There may be vulnerable trees that should be proactively removed and replaced with low vegetation.
- Debris catchers, depending on location, could be made with log snares for a more natural look or with heavy duty steel or iron beams and become public art.
- Debris catchers could potentially include integrated viewing platforms.
- Tree canopy in the watershed will be explored.

In response to the presentation on the West End, courthouse area, and Tiber-Hudson watershed, the MPAT members provided feedback:

- Is the county considering development regulations to control density?
 - V. Lazdins said at this point there are no recommendations to modify zoning regulations, but the Ellicott City master plan may recommend changes. For example, character-based codes are not currently in place in the county but could be incorporated.
- Concern with the watershed master plan showing residential development at the West End Service Center site.
- The Center for Watershed Protection has designs for street bumpouts for ESD; Montgomery County has such bumpouts.
- There should be more stream restoration in this watershed.
- The streetscape recommendations for downtown should be consistent in the West End.
- The zoning in the West End should be changed to allow some residences to convert to businesses.
 - T. McGilloway said the master plan will put the framework in place and serve as a guiding document, but it does not change zoning.
 - V. Lazdins said the zoning rewrite has been postponed to follow an upcoming county wide general plan update.

T. McGilloway asked the MPAT members for thoughts on presentation style for the October public meeting. MPAT members said:

- Some residents would like to vote for options and be able to see voting results rather than just voice thoughts.
 - T. McGilloway said polling was used at the November 2017 public workshop, but the questions were difficult to pose because there were many interrelated factors.
- Presenting by topic might be better than presenting by geographic zone.
- Be clear when presenting recommendations that some are projects, some are policies, and some are strategies about projects and policies.
- Talk about the timing of concepts and what is long-term vs. near-term.

- Explain how the master plan is a strategy, not exactly what will be.
- Start the presentation with general components: the water, the street, the hill. Add time components to it, then geographic areas. Break it up to be more manageable.

T. McGilloway thanked the MPAT for their feedback and said key next steps would be a public meeting in October then an MPAT debriefing meeting, with specific dates to be determined.

The meeting adjourned at 8:59 pm.

DRAFT